

In the Claims**BEST AVAILABLE COPY**

Claims are amended as follows:

1. (currently amended) A method of ~~allocating~~distributing traffic between a plurality of paths in a communications network comprising at least two nodes, said paths each being between the same pair of nodes and each path having a hash function associated therewith, and wherein said traffic comprises packets, each packet being a member of a flow and comprising a flow label and a hash function, said method comprising ~~allocating~~distributing the packets between the paths on the basis of the flow labels and hash functions wherein substantially all packets with the same flow label are distributed down the same path and wherein substantially all packets with the same hash function are distributed down the associated path.
- 2-3. (cancelled)
4. (original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said flow labels are selected from a pre-specified range of values in a pseudo random manner.
5. (original) A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein said flow labels are selected such that the selected flow labels substantially fit a specified form of distribution.
6. (original) A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein said form of distribution is a uniform distribution.
7. (cancelled)
8. (currently amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 which further comprises applying ~~the~~ the hash function to the flow labels and ~~allocating~~distributing the packets between the paths on the basis of the results of the hash function.
9. (original) A method as claimed in claim 8 which further comprises specifying a range of hash result values for each of the paths.
10. (original) A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein said ranges are specified on the basis of information about the total volume of traffic.

11. (original) A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein said ranges are specified on the basis of forecast information about the volume of particular flows.
12. (original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said paths are physical paths.
13. (original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said paths are logical paths.
14. (original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said packets are internet protocol packets.
15. (original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the paths are associated with an interface between an electrical region and an optical region of the communications network.
16. (currently amended) An apparatus for ~~allocating~~distributing traffic between a plurality of paths in a communications network comprising at least two nodes, said paths each being between the same pair of nodes and each path having a hash function associated therewith, and wherein said traffic comprises packets, each packet being a member of a flow and comprising a flow label and a hash function, said apparatus comprising a processor arranged to ~~allocate~~distribute the packets between the paths on the basis of the flow labels and the hash function, wherein substantially all packets with the same flow label are distributed down the same path and wherein substantially all packets with the same hash function are distributed down the same associated path.
17. (original) An apparatus as claimed in claim 16 which is a communications network node suitable for use within the core of a communications network.
18. (original) A communications network comprising an apparatus as claimed in claim 16.
19. (original) A communications network as claimed in claim 18 which comprises an electrical region and an optical region.
20. (currently amended) A computer program arranged to control an apparatus for ~~allocating~~distributing traffic between a plurality of paths in a communications network

comprising at least two nodes, said paths each being between the same pair of nodes and each path having a hash function associated therewith, and wherein said traffic comprises packets, each packet being a member of a flow and comprising a flow label and a hash function, said computer program being arranged to control the apparatus such that it ~~allocates~~distributes the packets between the paths on the basis of the flow labels and the hash function wherein substantially all packets with the same flow label are distributed down the same path and wherein substantially all packets with the same hash function are distributed down the associated path.

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